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ESSAY

Concerning our

OBLIGATIONS

TO HOLD

COMMUNION

With ALL that own

The Letter of the BIBLE.

WHEREIN

The ARGUMENTS for and
against it are consider'd.

By a LONDON Minister.

In a Letter to a Friend.

L O N D O N :

Printed for JOHN CLARK at the Bible
and Crown in the Poultry, near Cheap-
side. 1719. (Price Four-pence.)

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By a Learned Minister

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common Minister of Christ, only because
 he refused to have Communion with
 Mr. St. John the Baptist.

But that which renders the
 tion of the Subject still more necessary



I should hardly have gi-
 ven my self, or you,
 this Trouble, if I hadn't
 thought the Point con-
 cerning which I have
 undertaken to write to
 you, of great Moment; if I had not
 seen how industrious many are to
 banish that Discipline from Christian
 Churches, upon which, as I apprehend,
 the Glory of God, and the Peace and
 Tranquillity of these Religious Societies
 depend; and if I had not seen those
 who think it their Duty to plead for the

Preservation of it, loaded by the Patrons of Charity, with Reproach and Ignominy. Thus a Man that takes on him to answer Mr. *Bradbury*, notwithstanding his great Love to all that differ from him, in the most scandalous manner reviles an eminent Minister of Christ, only because he refus'd to have Communion with Mr. *St——n* the * *Arian*.

But that which renders the Consideration of the Subject still more necessary is, that a great Number of Ministers have espous'd the *Arian* Cause so far, as to declare for Communion with all who will Subscribe the Letter of the Bible, which no *Arian* will ever refuse to do. The *Whitehall Evening-Post* gave us this Account, which the Ministers concern'd allow to be just: "It has been carry'd
" for stating Doctrines only to be known
" by Revelation in the Words of Reve-
" lation only, when design'd to be a Stan-

* By an *Arian*, understand one who denies that the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost are the One God.

“ dard

"dard" or Test." So that the 50 whom the 60 Subscribers left, with any Others whom they call'd in to their Meeting afterwards agreed, that if Persons in giving an Account of their Faith, will make use of no other than Scripture Words, these shall be satisfactory to those who are on the Enquiry. I suppose you will not think that I have mistaken their Design. Their blaming the People at *Exeter* for not accepting a Declaration of their suspected Ministers in Scripture Words, is a Proof that I have not. † And I should have added, their foreseeing that a Declaration in other Words than those of Scripture, would not serve the Cause of Peace and Truth, and their declaring in Scripture Words accordingly, if they had not at last betaken themselves to a humane Form.

Concluding therefore that I have sta-

* This being oppos'd to the Subscribers, the Relater can mean by a Test only a Testification of what we believe, since the Subscription was propos'd as a Test in no other Sense.

† Vid. *Authentic Account* of the

red

ted the Principle right, I can't but warn you, as a Friend, of the spreading Error, and furnish you with some Considerations which may be useful to you at such a Juncture. My Business then is to shew you the Unreasonableness of this Opinion. That in the Case of receiving Members into Christian Communities, none are to be refused; and in the Case of Members receiv'd in, none are to be reject'd who will own the Letter of the Bible.

It is allow'd to be necessary, that for the Satisfaction of others, the Person who is examin'd should profess his Approbation of the Words of Scripture. As for Instance; he is to sign, if required, all the Texts relating to the Trinity. But to ask him how he understands these Places, is to set up an Inquisition. And the bare proposing a Question concerning the Sense of a Scripture, forfeits a Right to know how the Man understands it. Now let an impartial Person consider, what Satisfaction this can give the Enquirer, to hear a Man say, I believe

lieve that Jesus Christ is God, because
 the Scripture says *the Word was God*;
 when at the same time he knows, that
 the Person thus professing his Faith, may
 explain away what he takes to be the
 Sense, and the only Sense of the Place.
 I would fain know what the Words sig-
 nify when the Sense is gone; since
 Words are of no use at all, but as they
 lead us into the Knowledge of Things.
 We are not allow'd to insist on Mens
 coming into any humane Explications of
 Scripture, neither Ours nor their Own.
 And yet without this, as to all contro-
 verted Points amongst those who call
 themselves Christians, Texts have been
 so tortur'd and wrested, that 'tis impos-
 sible to know what they believe: And
 He who denies that which I take to be
 the only Sense of a Scripture to me, de-
 nies that place of Scripture, tho' he
 may own the Words. Thus for Exam-
 ple: When the Apostle calls Christ God
 over all, blessed for evermore, *Rom. ix,*
5. I am persuaded, he means nothing
 less, than that he is the necessarily Exi-
 stent

stent and infinitely perfect Being. And if an *Arian* subscribes this Text, because he won't allow the latter Part of it to belong to Christ, or because he can Accommodate it to his Notion of him as a subordinate God, this Man nevertheless, in my account, denies this part of the divine Revelation, because he fixes other Ideas to the Words than those which I believe the Spirit of God fix'd to them, when he directed the Apostle to use them. If it should be said in answer to this, that 'tis needless to desire so much as a particular Assent to those Scriptures which respect any Doctrine, and that for a Person to own he believes the Bible in gross, is sufficient. It may be reply'd; Why then did not Mr. *Peirce*, in so many Words, tell the People they had no right to know his Faith about the Trinity? Why did he propose an Assent to *Rom. ix. 5.* for their Satisfaction? And since he went so far as to own the Whole belongs to Christ, why could he not have been free, and have told them in what Sense he understood it,

it, unless he knew that he did not believe the Words in their Sense. Besides, if to subscribe the Bible in gross be sufficient, why did our Brethren the Non-subscribers; make any Declaration of their Faith concerning the particular Doctrine of the Trinity? There is thus much own'd by this Act of theirs, that the People should know for their Satisfaction, they believe the Scriptures relating to that Doctrine. But alas! what Satisfaction can this give to any considering Person, unless some way or other it appear, that they believe the Things as well as the Words, and that they don't reject what Those, for whose Satisfaction a Profession of Faith is design'd, do take to be the only Sense of those Words, and therefore the Scripture Doctrine.

But farther, let us enquire whether the acting according to that Principle which I am now considering, would produce good Effects, and tend to the Welfare of Christian Societies. If it would not, it can't be a Principle built on a good Foundation. And that it

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would

would not, will appear by our taking a View of some particular sorts of Persons, with whom Christians might some time or other be oblig'd to Communicate, if future Generations should approve of the generous Principle.

First, Christians might, some Time or other, be oblig'd to have Communion with *Anthropomorphites*: I suppose none will question whether there ever were any People who gave Occasion for this Name, by asserting, That God had Bodily Parts, as well as a Mind. Let us suppose that there were such Persons to be found at this Time, Men asserting that the Divine Being has Bodily Parts. And let us consider how, according to the Principle I am now examining, we must carry it towards these People. Why, 'tis certain they would subscribe the Letter of the Bible: and therefore they must not be refused Communion with the Churches of Christ. * To deny them this, would be like robbing them on the Highway, or defrauding them in our

* *Vid. Gale's Sermon on Charity.*

Dealings with them ; a very notorious Sin, a sad Infringement on Gospel Liberty and Charity. So that we'll suppose there would be one Party in the Church, believing that God is a Spirit without Bodily Parts, and representing it as an heinous Offence, and as detracting greatly from his Excellence and Glory, to assert the contrary ; because 'tis that which would turn the incorruptible into a corruptible Deity. We are to suppose that there would be another Party in this Church that were admitted, because they professed they could subscribe the Letter of the Bible, who believe that tho' God is said to be a Spirit, it will not follow from thence that he is a pure Spirit ; that tho' 'tis said God is invisible, it must not be understood without Restriction : And in short, that the Scriptures, which ascribe Bodily Parts to God, are to be understood in a proper Sense. And both these Parties must be allow'd sometimes to support their own Sense of Scripture, according to one Direction given in the Advices for Peace. The Words are these : " And that all be

“ allow'd by common Consent, to support their own Sense of Scripture upon proper Occasions, with such Reasons as appear to them convincing.” *

It is to be taken for granted therefore in the Case before us, there would be a proper Occasion for each Party to plead for their different Principles. For the Advice extends to all that are in Christian Communities. So that if there was such a Community as I have describ'd, one Party must be allow'd to support their Sense of Scripture, to shew that God is a pure Spirit; that there can be no such Deity as a Compounded one. And the other Party must be allow'd to contradict this, and use their Endeavours to make it appear, that God is a compounded Being; that he has Flesh and Spirit belonging to his Essence. And what a blessed Community would this be! What a glorious Liberty would the Members of it enjoy! Now tho' 'tis very probable there never may be any more of these erroneous Persons, 'tis possible that there may. And the Principle which would have oblig'd us

* *Vld. Advices for Peace in the Authentick Account.*

to hold Communion with them, when there were such, had we then been alive, and in that Part of the World where they liv'd, the Principle which would oblige us now to admit them, if there were such, cannot certainly be good.

Secondly, This Principle would oblige us to have Communion, if desir'd, with several sorts of Idolaters; with such as worship Bread and Wine for a God; with such as worship Angels and Saints; and with such as worship a God who exists nowhere but in their own Brain. It would oblige us to admit, when desir'd, such as worship Bread and Wine for a God. You know the Papists hold the Doctrine of Transubstantiation. They profess to believe that the Bread and the Wine in the Sacrament are chang'd into the real Body and Blood of Christ, and therefore worship the Elements. Let us suppose that a Person does not fall in with the Papists in all other Things, does not espouse all the other Errors of the *Ramist* Religion, but cannot quit this; and that notwithstanding his retaining it, he desires to be receiv'd

receiv'd into a Community of a different Principle. This Person would very readily subscribe the Letter of the Bible, and therefore according to this Principle of universal Liberty, must be admitted: And after he is admitted, none of the Members of the Community must be uneasy to see the good Man fall down and worship what they know to be Bread and Wine; and on proper Occasions to hear him defend the Idolatry. If it should be said we can hardly suppose there will be such a Case. I answer, more unlikely Things have happen'd; and 'tis enough for my purpose, if it be not impossible.

This Principle would also oblige us if it should be desired, to have Communion with those that worship Angels and Saints. The Invocation of Saints and Angels has been hitherto by the Generality of Protestants counted Idolatry; a giving the Honour due to none but God, unto those who are no Gods. But if Persons who are guilty of this see fit to propose to communicate with those of so vastly different Sentiments, they must not be refus'd. They will

will subscribe the Letter of the Bible; that is sufficient. They may sometimes give their own Sense of Scripture, and defend, after the best Manner they can, the worshipping of Saints and Angels; and the rest may, in their turn, prove it to be no other than Idolatry. No doubt but all these Things may be done for mutual Edification, as every Thing in a Christian Society ought to be.

And as I have mention'd two Cases which tho' they are not impossible, and therefore may be suppos'd, yet may never happen; I come now to consider one which relates to our Circumstances in the present Day, and that is the Case of those who are the Followers of Dr. C—k and Mr. W—. I believe, Sir, you will allow that Communion with Idolaters, can't be for Edification *: And yet I will undertake to prove, that these Persons do justly come under the Charge; and 'tis undeniable, that according to the Principle I am examining, there is no way of avoiding Communion with them. Can I sit down at the

* 2 Cor. vi. 16, 17.

Lord's Table with those that have more Gods than one; and worship a supreme and a subordinate God? And yet this is the Case: These Persons imagine there is a Being distinct from that one God, so often spoken of in the O. T. who is truly and properly God, and to this inferior God they pay a Divine Worship. Now they who are fully persuaded that there is but one Object of religious Worship, ev'n the supreme Being, cannot acquit those from the Charge of Idolatry, who own and worship two Gods: Their doing this ignorantly does by no means alter the Nature of the Thing. And their endeavouring to get off from the Charge, by saying, that tho' the Scripture affirms there is but One God, the meaning is, but One supreme God, is an Invention worthy the Authors. For had there been a supreme and subordinate God over the *Jews*, as well as a supreme and subordinate God among the *Pagans*, how absurd must it have been for the inspir'd Penman to have oppos'd this Proposition to their Theology, That there is but One God, since they would have have own'd it in
this

this Sense. And the Distinction between the supreme and subordinate Worship the Reverend Mr. *Burnett* has prov'd * to be equally ridiculous; a Distinction not to be found throughout the Holy Scriptures. So that we cannot acquit them from Idolatry, in that they have form'd in their own Imaginations, another God besides the One living and true God, who is suppos'd to have Existed before all Worlds; who is suppos'd to govern them, and to be the Object of Prayer and Praise. I need not enlarge on the other Thing, and shew you, that according to the Principle I am examining, there is no avoiding Communion with these Persons. And surely among the Members of such a Community, there must be the utmost Satisfaction, while one side are on proper Occasions, supporting their Sense of Scripture, and asserting, that there is but One God, and that he only is to be worshipp'd; that to have more Gods than One is the very Idolatry which the *Jews* were so constantly warn'd against: And while the other side are, on proper Occasions,

* *Vid. Burnett's Equality of the Son with the Father.*

supporting their Sense of Scripture, and asserting there is One God supreme, another God subordinate, who are both to be own'd and worshipp'd: And they who keep *Arian* Members in their Churches (as some I could name do) may probably when they come to be a little more numerous, and freely take the Liberty allow'd them, perceive the good Effects of such a Mixture.

But I have one Thing more to add, and that is, that trace the just Consequences of this Principle, and there will be no stopping here. What is the Foundation of the Principle contended for? Why, 'tis this, That humane Explications are made by fallible Men, and therefore not to be regarded in a Profession of Faith. And may not Persons for the very same Reason, reject our Translation of the Bible, and appeal to the *Hebrew* and *Greek*? And when they come to those, may they not be allowed to own what they please and reject what they please, and to make a Bible for themselves, known to none but themselves and their Minister. Now this is the glorious Liberty which is in effect

effect defended. I don't say, that all the Non-subscribing Ministers would carry Matters thus far; I am apt to think many of them at least, would be very unwilling to receive those who would not agree to the main of our *English* Translation. But 'tis certain, that what I have mention'd would be the Effects of this Opinion pursu'd in its genuine and unavoidable Consequences; and then they who are call'd on, to give a Reason of the Hope that is in them, might do it in a Method understood by none of those for whose sakes 'tis design'd. Thus instead of Order we should have Confusion, and instead of Peace the greatest Distraction.

Before I leave this part of the Subject, I can't but just take notice of something offer'd by the Reverend Mr. *Evans*, concerning this Matter, in a Letter to Mr. *Cumming*. And now I mention this, I think my self oblig'd to return him my hearty Thanks for the Satisfaction he has given me in his Letter, with respect to his Faith, and for the publick Acknowledgment he has made, that he believes the Declara-

from which the Ministers on the other Side subscribed, to be agreeable to the Scripture. I don't suppose he design'd to impose such a Confession on the others who refus'd to sign the Declaration: To suggest such a Thing, would be to put a vile Construction on a praise-worthy Action. But I should be very glad if they would evidence their Approbation of what he has done herein, by doing the like themselves: And I believe, if they don't think it proper to take that Method, or some other of the like nature, it will hardly be expected by reasonable People, that the *Templer's** Proposal should be comply'd with, and that the Ministers who did declare, and have been so abus'd for declaring for themselves, should undertake to declare for others too. But that which I mention'd Mr. *Evans's* Letter for is this; he freely owns that he could have Communion with one who differs from him, as to the Sense of Scripture, in important Points; I suppose he means those of peculiar Importance, because every Divine Truth is of some Im-

* Vid. Letter to the Four Ministers.

portance.

portance. And he says, speaking concerning such an one: "I should proceed
 " either to admit him to Communion or
 " not, as I thought upon the Whole, it
 " would be like to do more hurt or good
 " in the Christian Society where I minister. If I found him dispos'd peaceably
 " and quietly to enjoy his own Opinion,
 " without disturbing the Peace of the
 " Congregation, I know not how I durst
 " refuse one whom I believe in my Con-
 " science Christ receives." The Arguments which may be brought against
 Communion with *Arians*, are to be taken
 either from the Nature of their Opinions,
 or from the Consequences which
 might be expected to follow the Admission
 of them. Now I am very glad to
 find such a Concession made by my Reverend
 Brother on this Head, as that
 which is contain'd in the Passage which
 I have quoted: He grants, that if he
 apprehended the Admission of a Person
 who had embrac'd Principles different
 from his, would disturb the Peace of
 the Community, he should refuse to admit
 him. He can therefore argue for receiving

ceiving in Persons of *Arian* Principles or for keeping in such Persons only, upon the Supposition, that the Tranquility of the Society may be preserv'd, and that the Man would keep his Opinion to himself. So that all we have to do is to consider, whether this is a thing to be suppos'd; and for my part I can't think that it is. For first, in my Opinion, it would be very unreasonable to desire the Man to keep his Opinion to himself, and to avoid all Methods, for causing it to spread. An Allowance is already made in the Advices for Peace, that All shall have Liberty to support their own Sense of Scripture: and would Mr. *Evans* after subscribing this Article, tye up any ones Hands? If it is not a reasonable Allowance, why was it made? If it is, why should it be expected or desir'd, that any should forbear the Use of it? Besides, it is said in an *Arian* Pamphlet, entitled, *A Letter to a Dissenter in Exeter*, p. 4. That the Doctrine of the Trinity is a Matter of great Moment, and that the Controversy is about the Supreme Object of Worship. And if a Man thinks it a Mat-
ter

ter of so much Importance, he must believe himself to be bound in Duty to do all he can to set others right. And how improper would it be, to desire him to avoid what in his Conscience he must believe himself obliged to? Secondly, Since 'tis not to be expected, that according to Mr. *Evans's* Supposition, the Person in such a Case as that before us, should be willing to keep his Opinion to himself; Let us now consider how unavoidably the Use of it must disturb the Peace of the Congregation. How can a Society of Christians be easy, who believe there is but One true and proper God, but One Object of religious Worship, while there are any amongst them who assert and persuade others to believe, that there are Two distinct Beings, each of them truly and properly God, and each of them to be worshipped with religious Worship? who Labour also to convince them, that the Holy Ghost is in no Sense God, and that no Worship at all is due to him? Certainly 'tis impossible for a Society of Christians to be easy, while any amongst them differ from them in Matters of so great Importance. There

There are Two Things alledg'd on the other Side, which are now to be consider'd. We are told, that if we refuse to have Communion with *Arians*, we infringe on Gospel Liberty, and act uncharitably. First, We are charg'd with being against Liberty. It is said, that hereby we justify all sorts of Impositions and Persecution. I can't but think indeed, that many who make this Clamour know in their own Consciences there is nothing in it. As for those who really believe it, they must be guilty of a great deal of Weakness. Do not all of us declare against the Infringement on Mens Civil Rights, merely on the account of Differences in Religion? And can any one be so ridiculous as to imagine, that because we are not willing to have Communion with certain Persons, we would throw them into Prisons, or put them to Death? Is there any manner of Connexion between the one and the other? We are told, that we must make no Bounds of Communion but what the Scripture makes. 'Tis granted. And since 'tis no fault for us to judge for our

our selves, concerning the Sense of Scripture, and to act according to that Judgment which we form; 'tis to be hop'd we may, without Offence, do it in this Case: And that if we really believe the Word of God does forbid our communicating with *Arians*, we shall not be represented as Enemies to Liberty, for using our Liberty. Now that this is no Breach of Gospel Liberty, but what we are directed to by the Word of God; and that he has set this Boundary of Communion, is evident from his forbidding our communicating with those that Worship more than One God, and from his express Command, that every Thing in a Religious Society be done for the Edification of the Whole, inconsistent with which I have prov'd the Admission of *Arians* to be. So that notwithstanding we cannot be such *Latitudinarians* as some are, we have as good a Right as any to plead for the Liberty which we ever desired. We have still a Right to plead for the Liberty of private Judgment,

ment, without being oblig'd to suffer any temporal Inconveniencies on the account of our Sentiments in Religion. We have still a Right to blame those who make what they own to be indifferent, a Condition of living in their Communion. But we never did, we never shall blame any Society for fixing those Conditions of being admitted amongst them, which they really believe necessary for their Welfare. Secondly, We are said to be Uncharitable, because we won't admit *Arians*, and are represented as pronouncing them in a State of Damnation, because we refuse Communion with them. Two Things may be return'd in Answer to this, *scilicet*, That there is nothing so severe in the refusing them, and that we should, on the contrary, be guilty of a Breach of Charity if we should admit them. First, There is nothing so severe in the refusing them; If barely the refusing to admit a Person into a Christian Church, is a pronouncing him in a State of Damnation, then all our Brethren of
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the *Baptist* Persuasion, must be chargeable with this sad Breach of Charity, since they, merely on the account of Difference, as to this Point, refuse to receive Persons into their Communities. It's well known, that tho' some of them plead so eagerly for admitting all who will subscribe the Letter of the Bible, there is one Case in which they depart from that Principle, and a Case which I must own, I think of much less Importance than the Doctrine of the Trinity. They won't receive a Person that will subscribe the Letter of what is said concerning Baptism. But he must agree to their Sense of it, if he will come into their Churches: Thus inconsistent are the Non-subscribing *Baptists* with themselves. But however their using their Liberty was never look'd upon as a damning those that differ from them, either by themselves or others. So that 'tis plain, we do not declare our persuasion, that *Arians* are in a State of Damnation, by not consenting to receive them, and therefore are not chargeable with

with this Uncharitableness. Secondly, On the other hand, we should be uncharitable if we should receive them: It would argue a want of Love to Christian Societies, which must, as I have already shewn, be unavoidably thrown into Confusion by the Reception of them.

I hope, Sir, you will excuse this Trouble, and I know you will think a valuable End answer'd, if I should only set a more skilful Hand to work, to stop the Tide of Error.

I am

Your humble Servant.

